60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Electric people
What crashed at Rendlesham?
Sagée and her shadow
Every man an alien?
Dowsing dissected

106

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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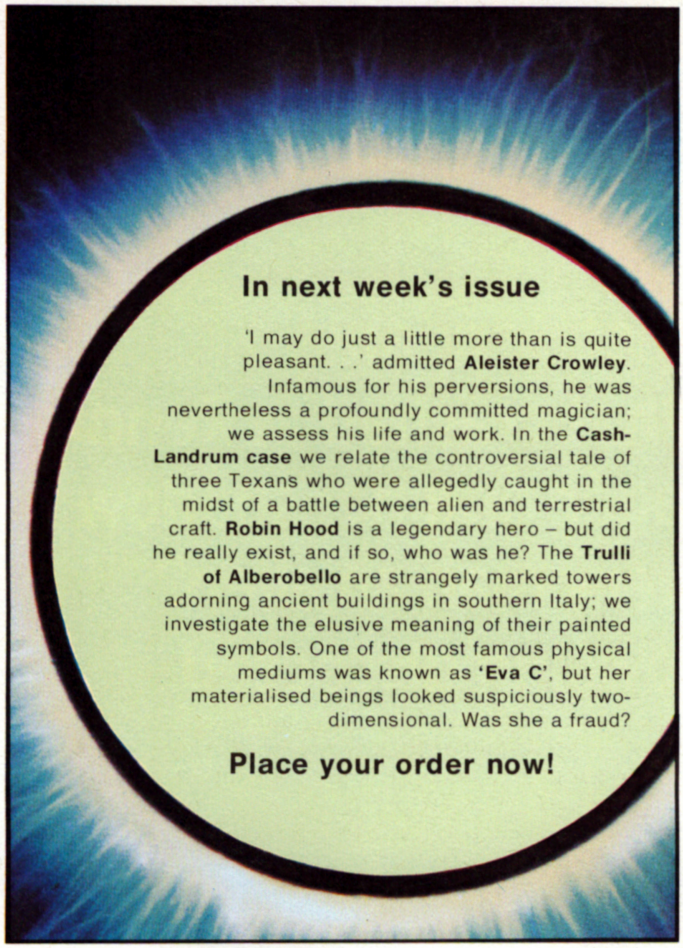

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Impact-and after

Did high-ranking US Air Force officers talk to the crew of a UFO that crashed in East Anglia? Or was the story a smokescreen for a potentially deadly military accident? JENNY RANDLES reports on the rumours and the evidence

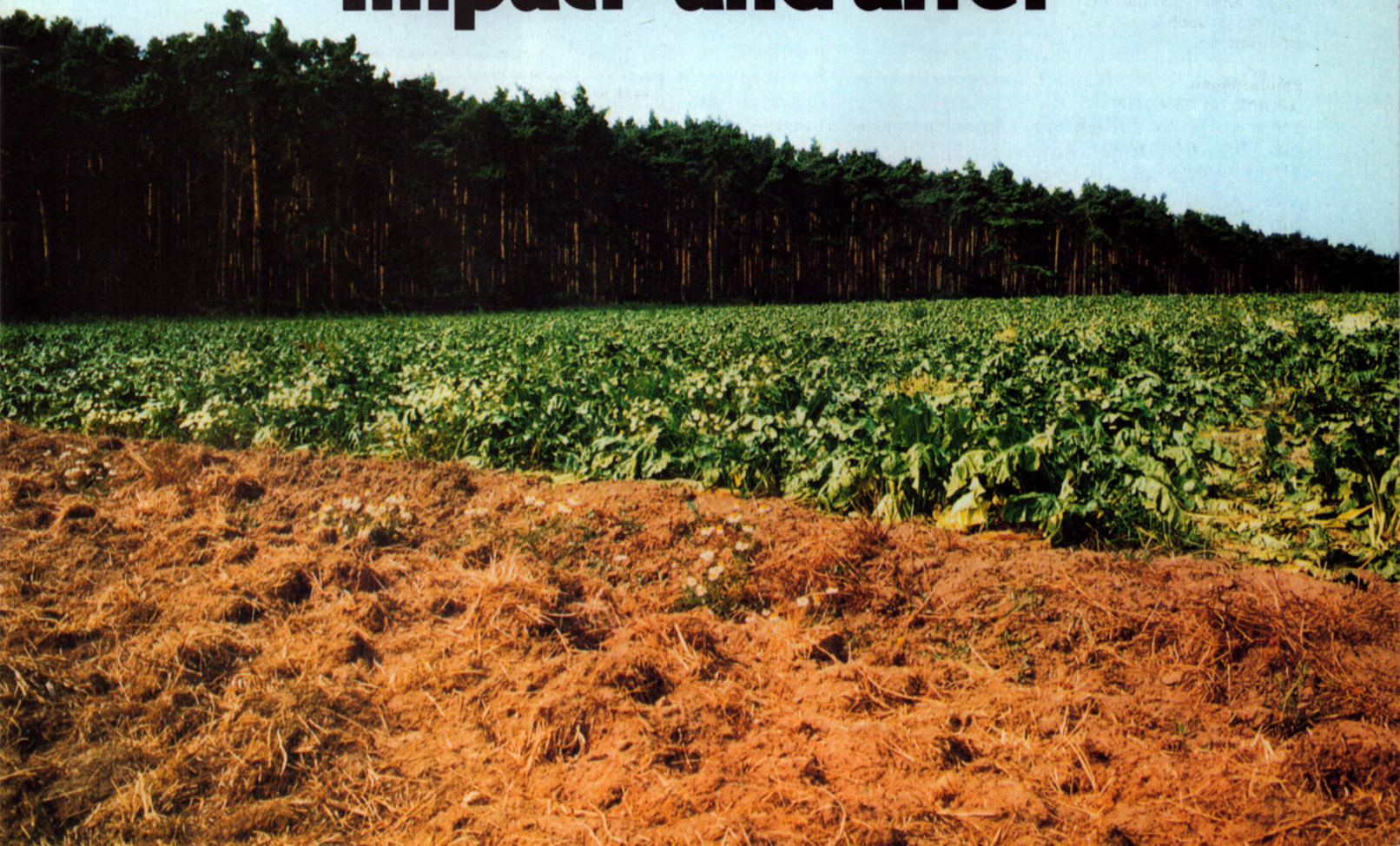
THE STUDY OF ALLEGED CRASHES of alien craft does not enjoy a degree of respectability proportional to its importance. Many ufologists decry those who try to unravel the truth behind such mysteries, for there are major problems with all these stories. The crashes always seem to occur in remote desert regions. In nearly all of them many years elapse before they are investigated. And there are very few witnesses, all of whom demand strict confidentiality, 'for fear of reprisals'. They insist that the security lid on these events is so tight that if it were made public that they had spoken out they would live in fear of the consequences.

These criticisms are true even of the cases studied by Leonard Stringfield, the pioneer in this field. He has collected information on a whole series of American retrievals (as they are known in ufologists' jargon), and one, at least – the Kingman, Arizona, case of May 1953 – has an appreciable degree of support. His very important research was published in the United States and appeared in a three-part series in the respected British journal *Flying Saucer Review*. The Roswell case (see page 2034) is one of Stringfield's – and actually one of the most poorly supported.

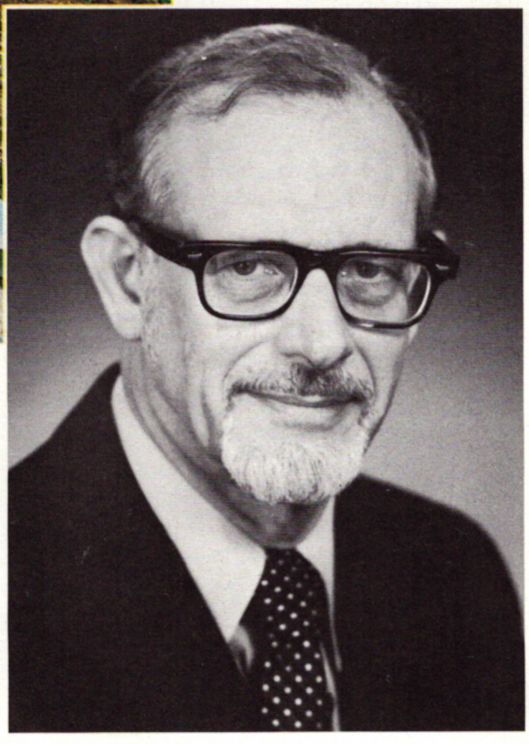
But where, we might wonder, are the recent crashes? Or the ones *not* in a desert area? Or the witnesses who *will* speak out? Well, some of these conditions may have been fulfilled by the remarkable incident at Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, in East Anglia in December 1980.

Rendlesham Forest is a pretty woodland area about 12 miles (19 kilometres) east and north of Ipswich. It is surrounded by some of the most sparsely populated land in south-eastern England, fenland on which there are scattered farms. The only community of any real size is the village of Woodbridge to the west. North of the woods lie the US Air Force bases at Woodbridge and Bentwaters. These are important elements of the NATO defence system and would be of great strategic significance in the event of any future European war.

Between 27 and 30 December 1980 a number of reports of lights in the sky were made from this general area, especially around the coastal town of Leiston. A nuclear power station is nearby and some very interesting close encounters have been recorded in this vicinity. Brenda Butler and Dot Street, local investigators for the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA), followed up the sightings of the lights. They included one from a witness who said he observed a brilliant white light that hovered



The expanse of Rendlesham Forest, in Suffolk, set in flat, lonely countryside. Local people saw lights descending into the forest and Forestry Commission workers found scorched trees. The reports coincided with sensational stories emanating from a local air base, telling of a UFO landing



Above: the ufologists who studied the wave of independent UFO reports centred on the Rendlesham Forest area: Dot Street (left) and Brenda Butler at the spot where they estimate that a brightly lit object, reported by a local farmer, must have descended. The Rendlesham case is more promising for research than the classic 'retrieval' cases compiled by the leading American ufologist Leonard Stringfield (above right), for the reports were nearly contemporary with the incidents described

above Rendlesham Forest for 20 minutes or more. Being used to the activity around the air bases he assumed he was seeing one of their aircraft, though he was puzzled as to why it remained over the woods for so long.

Early in January 1981 one of Brenda Butler's trusted contacts at the Woodbridge base passed an astonishing piece of information to her. He said that a UFO had come down in the forest, about 2 miles (3 kilometres) from the base. It seems that this was probably on 30 December. The contact, a high-ranking officer, visited the scene along with the base commander and security personnel. They carried no weapons – these were expressly forbidden. The commander talked for some time with small 'aliens', 3 feet (1 metre) tall and wearing silver suits, who were suspended in 'shafts of light' beside the landed craft.

Classified conversations

Brenda Butler's contact refused to tell her specific details of the shape of the object, which was apparently damaged and being repaired. He also refused to comment on the subject matter of the detailed conversations that took place. Eventually, he claimed, the UFO departed – unsteadily at first – and strict security was imposed on all personnel who knew of the affair. Photographs that had been taken by some officers, without permission, were immediately confiscated. The officer mentioned, provocatively, that this was not the first time that a UFO had landed near – or perhaps even *on* – the base.

This officer was willing to talk to Butler only because of their past dealings and on the strict understanding that his confidentiality should be preserved. She was also required, at first, not to make use of the information he had imparted about this incident.

Brenda Butler agreed to the officer's request. She kept the story to herself throughout January, not even relating it to her close colleague Dot Street. Even when she did tell her the story – about four weeks later, when rumours of the incident had begun to circulate from other sources – she continued to observe the officer's confidentiality. Consequently we are heavily reliant on her word. However, in discussions with the author she seemed both sincere and reliable.

A year later another investigator succeeded in confirming the existence of Brenda Butler's contact. Harry Harris, a lawyer and an investigator with the Manchester UFO Research Association, spoke to the officer, who confirmed the basic details as Brenda had reported them. However, he avoided all subsequent attempts by Harris to communicate with him.

The rumour emerged during February 1981, through several channels. All were independent of each other, of Brenda Butler, and of the media. Indeed, considering the number of people in the area who seem to have heard about the events, this lack of

attention from the local press, radio and television seems a little enigmatic. It is the sort of story that they usually jump at. Butler and Street suggest that there are indications that this lack of interest was due to influence in high places.

The author Paul Begg heard one of the rumours from an acquaintance in his local pub, near Rendlesham. This man said he worked as a radar operator in a civilian establishment in the neighbouring county of Norfolk. A friend had been on duty on 30 December and had tracked an unknown target heading south (which was towards the Rendlesham Forest area). The radar return did not correspond to that of any known aircraft.

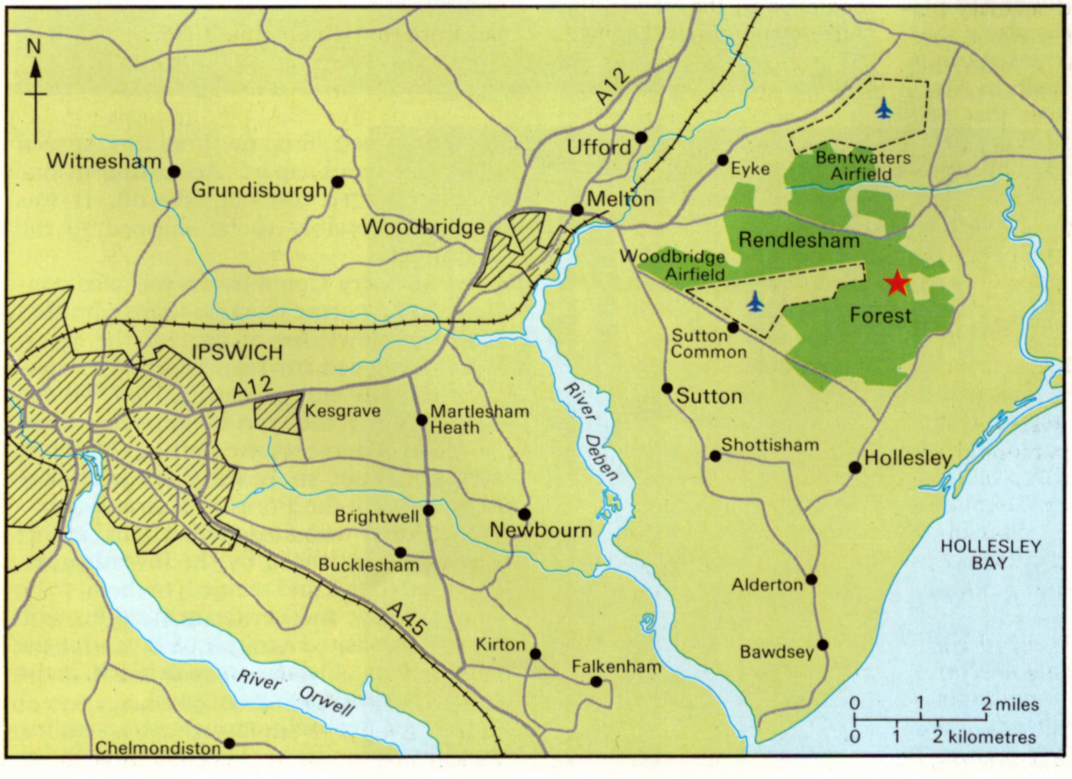
A couple of days later, there were surprise visitors to the radar centre. US Air Force officers arrived and took away the tapes of the radar tracking from the relevant night. They advised the civilian operators, in confidence, that the object they had tracked had landed near or on the Woodbridge airfield – and that aliens had emerged. Personnel from the base had approached in a jeep, the engine of which had failed as it came close to the craft. The air force personnel had then conversed with the aliens.

Paul Begg reported the story to the author, and she asked Peter Warrington, a specialist investigator of radar cases, to follow up the case. He talked to the radar operators and got the same details from them. All of this occurred before any of the participants knew of the information that Brenda Butler and Dot Street possessed.

The editor of BUFORA's *Journal*, Norman Oliver, also received an account of an incident at the Woodbridge base. It essentially said that something 'big' had taken place there and, although lacking detail, was generally consistent with the information received by others. The story came from the United States, from a serviceman who had returned there after being stationed in England and therefore may have felt more free to talk.

Finally there was local gossip that 'something queer' had gone on at the air base. These stories involved an 'air crash' in the forest and did not seem to refer to a UFO. The belief that there had been a crash was strengthened by the report of a farmer who lived beside the wood and had seen a brightly lit object descend into the forest. He telephoned the base and suggested that one of their aircraft had come down. He was not

An A-10 ground attack aircraft of the US Air Force. According to an informant from the USAF base at Woodbridge, aircraft of this type were sent over the area of the alleged UFO encounter the day after it happened, supposedly to monitor radioactivity. The aircraft is designed to fly safely at very low speeds and low altitudes, making it valuable for ground surveys



Left: the area of Suffolk that includes Rendlesham Forest and the nearest large town, Ipswich. The country around the forest is some of the loneliest in Britain. Two versions of the UFO encounter story are current: according to one, the object landed in the forest, roughly in the area marked by the red star; according to the other, it landed on the Woodbridge air base itself

told otherwise when officers from the base came to interview him later. Local gossip subsequently had it that the base was keeping quiet about the affair.

Brenda Butler also discovered that in early January forestry workers found that some tree tops in the forest – in the area where the light was seen to descend – were scorched. They reported this to the air base and were politely informed that they should not talk about it.

In February the two women investigators arranged an appointment with the Woodbridge base commander. He declined, however, to answer any questions about the alleged crash, though he did ask *them* a number of questions about their UFO research. Finally he informed them that UFO data were referred to the Ministry of Defence, and that they should contact them. The Ministry replied to Butler's subsequent letter that they knew nothing of such an incident – and suggested that she should get in touch with the base commander.

Terror ride

Butler and Street drove directly to the forest from their meeting with the commander. When they were approaching the area where they believed the light had been seen to come down, they had a curious experience. The car began to vibrate and then accelerated to between 60 and 70 miles per hour (96 and 113 km/h), while completely out of the control of the driver, Brenda Butler. After about half a mile (800 metres) the car stopped. Both women were frightened by the occurrence. On their return journey the car also vibrated at one point and skidded.

These incidents strongly impressed the investigators. However, it must be said that the car was old and rickety, and was being driven on a rough forest road. Their interpretations of the events may owe something to an excited imagination.

On this visit and later ones, Butler and Street found local inhabitants who claimed that there had been much military activity in the forest during January. There were also stories of house lights and television sets flickering on and off.

Furthermore, several personnel from the base admitted that they knew about the supposed landing. However, it is not at all clear to what extent they were reporting what they had heard rather than what they had experienced at first hand. It seems likely that rumours were now sweeping the community on the base, gathering new elements as they did so. Certainly a number of new assertions were brought into the account at this stage: for example, that radioactivity remained in the forest, that local cattle had 'played up'

Like all US Air Force bases in Britain, Woodbridge (top) is a top security area. The signs that warn off intruders (above) are backed up by guard dogs, sentries and high-security fences. If something out of the ordinary interrupted the normal functioning of the base in December 1980, it would be virtually impossible for an outsider to find out anything about it. But an *insider* had plenty to tell Brenda Butler about an alleged conversation between top air force officers and tiny silver-suited aliens

and that the UFO stood on three legs, spaced 30 feet (9 metres) apart. According to one rumour, the UFO did not take off. It was 'retrieved', possibly to be shipped to the United States.

The Forestry Commission was also contacted. At first some workers there admitted to having knowledge of part of the story. Then they denied any knowledge of it whatsoever. It was later discovered by Brenda Butler that in the period between these conflicting statements the part of the forest where the event supposedly occurred was burnt down by the Forestry Commission!

The farmer who made the original report to the base was traced by the investigators. He refused to talk and seemed, to them, to be frightened. But another farmer and his wife told of being visited a couple of days after the 'crash' by two 'officials' – men in black, in the classic tradition! (See page 510.)

The situation was complicated, according to Brenda Butler, by her visit with Dot Street

Above: US Air Force F-111 fighter-bombers are based in Britain, and certain variants have the ability to carry nuclear weapons. Could the UFO rumours associated with Rendlesham Forest be a 'disinformation' exercise – designed to disguise some accident involving an aircraft with a nuclear bomb load from a nearby airfield?

to see the base commander. Afterwards, she was told, he called an internal enquiry, and one man who was suspected of leaking information was sent back to the United States before he had been scheduled to go.

It is very difficult to evaluate this complex and infuriating affair. Aside from Harry Harris and Dot Street, no one except Brenda Butler has talked to the personnel from the base who have released this information. All other investigators have come up against a wall of denials.

However, we do have the independently recorded testimony of the civilian radar operator and the serviceman who had returned to the USA. And there do appear to be a striking number of local rumours about an air crash and also about several odd experiences that occurred around the same time in the vicinity of the forest. And if the relevant part of the forest really was burned when it is said to have been, this would seem to tie in too closely with the change in attitude of the Forestry Commission to be coincidental. All of this would indicate some strange happening, regardless of how we view the evidence given by understandably anonymous sources to Brenda Butler.

There seem to be two possibilities that could explain what happened. Either a conventional aircraft was forced to land in Rendlesham Forest – or an unconventional one did so.

It is interesting to recall that Bentwaters was one of the bases involved, with Lakenheath (a few miles north), in a classic radar-visual encounter in August 1956 (see page 198). Within days of that famous case, so it has been alleged, a nuclear cataclysm was only narrowly averted when a crash and subsequent fire at the Lakenheath base almost caused live nuclear weapons to detonate.

If such a disaster was threatened, it was efficiently concealed from the public for over 20 years. And this makes it *conceivable* that in December 1980 an American aircraft *did* crash into Rendlesham Forest and the fact was covered up – possibly because the aircraft was carrying a nuclear device. In which case the UFO landing story might have been used deliberately as a convenient distraction from the disturbing truth.

This leaves a couple of questions unanswered, however. Could an aircraft crash really be hidden? The area is sparsely inhabited, to be sure, so it is not surprising that the impact was not witnessed. But to remove all the remnants of the crash would be a long and difficult operation. More significantly, perhaps, it was the aircraft crash rumour that was circulated among local people by hints dropped by various members of the air base personnel. Could it be that *this* was a cover-up story – intended to conceal a UFO landing?

Open areas are dotted throughout Rendlesham Forest. If UFO landings really do occur, such spots, located in a thinly populated area, would be ideal sites

Right: the electric eel – really a fish – is an example in nature of an animal able to store and use electricity. It can deliver a shock of up to 500 volts

Below right: Brian Williams of Cardiff made the news in 1952 as a human so full of electricity that he could light a lamp simply by rubbing it with his hand

Switched on and shocking

There are people who can deliver an electric shock with their touch, make electrical appliances stop working, or attract objects to their bodies. How? BOB RICKARD sheds some light on the phenomenon of 'electric people'

IN 1938 MRS ANTOINE TIMMER went to New York with high hopes of winning a $10,000 prize offered for demonstrating a psychic phenomenon not reproducible by trickery. The demonstration was organised by the Universal Council for Psychic Research, headed by the famous stage magician Joseph Dunninger. Mrs Timmer, seeking to understand her singular ability herself, showed how spoons and other small objects stuck to her hands and could only be removed by a vigorous tug. Her claim was dismissed because Dunninger said that he could do what she did with a concealed thread. Nonetheless, there were no allegations of trickery against Antoine Timmer – and she no doubt went away as puzzled by her magnetic hands as when she came. On their part, the council missed a chance to explore a truly unexplained phenomenon.

Above: Joseph Dunninger, the American stage magician who headed the Universal Council for Psychic Research. When in 1938 the organisation offered a prize for the demonstration of a psychic phenomenon 'not reproducible by trickery', they failed to recognise 'magnetic hands' as worthy of investigation

People with unusual magnetic or electrical abilities are not all that rare. These 'human magnets' and 'human spark plugs' may attract objects to their body, create disturbances in electrical machines, shock other people with their touch. But whatever their behaviour, 'electric people' make the news in the 20th century as they did in the 19th, when interest in all kinds of curiosities was particularly high.

For example, the *Daily Mirror* of 23 March 1967 told the story of Brian Clements, known to his friends as 'Flash Gordon'. Clements was so highly charged that he had to discharge his voltage into metal furniture before he touched anyone. The previous week the *Sunday Express* of 19 March 1967 reported the miserable life of Mrs Grace Charlesworth, who had been tormented by electric shocks in her house for two years after having lived there uneventfully for 40 years. She said: 'Sometimes they have swung me round bodily and in the night my head has started to shake as though I was using a pneumatic drill. One day sparks ran up the walls.' Curiously, it was only Mrs Charlesworth who was affected; her husband was aware only of an occasional humming noise.

Not surprisingly, many instances of electric people have been noticed or recorded by doctors. In January 1869, the doctor who delivered a baby in St Urbain, France, said the infant was charged up 'like a Leyden jar' (a type of electrostatic condenser). The baby shocked all who touched him, and luminous rays emanated from his fingers. This peculiarly endowed baby had a brief life, dying in his ninth month. Douglas Hunt records

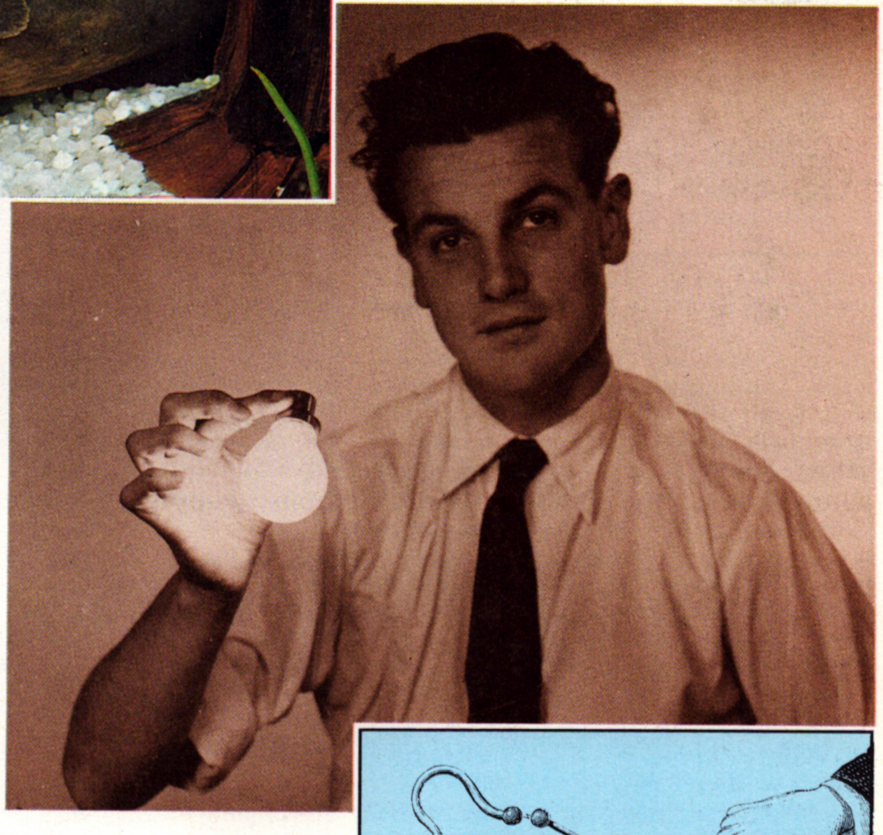
two similar but non-fatal cases in *Prediction* magazine (January 1953). In the first instance, a doctor received a sharp shock while delivering a baby. The baby's 'electrification' lasted 24 hours, during which time he was actually used to charge a Leyden jar, and sparks issued from him. The second infant gave off a 'feeble white light' and caused 'vibrations' in small metal objects brought near his hands and feet.

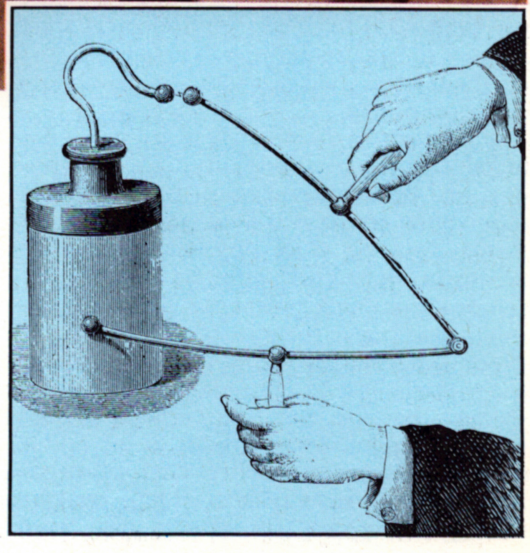
Other 19th-century cases are even more spectacular. Vincent Gaddis mentions three in his book *Mysterious fires and lights* (1967). The first occurred in 1889 and concerned Frank McKinstry, of Joplin, Missouri, USA, a man with a reputation as a good dowser. He was plagued in a peculiar way: his charge was so strong in the early morning that he had to keep moving. If he stopped even for a second, he became fixed to the ground and had to wait until a helpful passer-by would pull one of his legs free. There would be a small faint flash and the grip would be broken – until the next time he stood still.

The second case cited by Gaddis concerned 17-year-old Caroline Clare of London, Ontario, Canada, who suffered from a strange undiagnosable debilitation in 1877. Her weight fell dramatically to about 6½ stone (40 kilograms), and she suffered spasms and trances. These passed after a year and a half – and then the electrical phenomena began. Metal objects would jump into her hand when she reached for them and, if she held one for any length of time, it stuck to her until someone pulled if off. She shocked those she touched, in one experiment passing the shock along 20 people holding hands in a line. The electrical phenomena lasted for several months and, once gone, never returned.

Thirdly, Gaddis mentions 16-year-old Louis Hamburger, who, in 1890, was a student in Maryland, USA. When the tips of his fingers were dry, he could pick up heavy objects simply by touching them. Pins would dangle from his open hand as though from a magnet, and needed a vigorous shake to send them flying. His favourite demonstration was to place his fingers against a glass beaker full of iron filings and pull the filings up the inside of the beaker by moving his fingers up the outer surface.

Both humans and animals have nervous systems that generate electricity, and some animals are able to store and use this potential. For example, electric eels – which are really fish – have an organ in their tails that produces an electric current. This current





Right: a Leyden jar is a device used for storing electricity. It produces a spark when its inside and outside metal foil coatings are connected by a wire. One doctor has reported delivering a baby so 'electrified' that he was actually used to charge a Leyden jar

A highly-charged subject

In many respects electricity behaves like, and is described in terms of, a fluid. For example, we speak of an electric *current*. This is a *stream* of electrons that carry negative electric charge and are constituents of atoms. The rate of *flow* of the current is measured in amps. The 'pressure' that drives the current is electrical potential, measured in volts and more often simply called voltage. The quantity of electric charge is measured in coulombs, one coulomb being the amount of electric charge that flows when one amp passes for one second.

When electricity accumulates on the human body as a result of friction – say of a nylon shirt rubbing on car upholstery – it may be at a potential of thousands of volts. But the quantity of charge is tiny, so that it can do little harm when discharged. This can be compared to the jet of water from a water pistol – it is delivered at a high pressure, but in too small a quantity to do any damage. Dangerous shocks, such as those from electric mains, are caused by large currents flowing at a high voltage for a relatively long period.

Usually we are unaware of the electrical nature of matter because negative and positive charges exist in equal quantities around us, and their effects cancel out. Only when the two are separated are their effects seen.

Such effects include fleeting and small-scale examples of the phenomena exhibited by 'electric people'. Rub a plastic comb on a sleeve and it will take up electrons, which are negatively charged and can move about, from the cloth. It can then attract a small piece of paper. This is because the comb's negative electrons repel the paper's negative electrons in accordance with the fundamental electrical law that 'likes repel, unlikes attract'. The paper's negative electrons move away and leave the surface of the paper that is closest to the comb with a surplus of positive charge. The 'positive' paper is then attracted to the 'negative' comb. There is a similar effect when a balloon is rubbed on clothing: it will gain a charge that causes it to stick to things.

Angélique Cottin (bottom) was one of the most famous 'electric girls' of the 19th century. However, her powers seemed to wane when she was investigated by a hostile team appointed by the French Academy of Sciences and led by the physicist François Arago (below). But she was not accused of fraud

passes from the tail to the front and enables the fish to discharge a hefty shock of up to 500 volts, depending on the animal's size and health. The biggest jolt is delivered when the fish's head and tail touch well-separated parts of the victim's body, so allowing the current to travel some distance. The human body can accumulate about 10,000 volts when a person walks across a thick carpet but, unlike the electric eel's shock, any jolt given is harmless. This is because the body can develop only a small electrical charge, which means in turn that the current discharged is small. In contrast to this, the 'electric people' seem to be able to utilise their electrical potential, although they may not even want to. Their physiological state appears to have something to do with it, just as the electric eel's health influences its electrical power.

For example, disease may play a part – not in itself, but in its alterations of the metabolism and other physiological functions. An astonishing report was made in 1920 by Dr Julius Ransom, chief physician at a state prison in New York, after 34 inmates developed botulinus poisoning. During convalescence, one of them screwed up a piece of paper and tried to throw it away, but the paper stuck fast to his hand. Investigation showed that the man was carrying a high static charge, and so were all of his fellow sufferers. They could deflect compass needles and make a suspended steel tape sway by moving their hands towards and away from it. The phenomena ceased when the men recovered.

There is also evidence that atmospheric and geomagnetic conditions may play a part in the strange phenomenon of electric people. Consider the case of 'a lady of great respectability', reported in the *American Journal of Science* (1838) by her physician Dr Willard Hosford. She was aged 30, of a nervous temperament and sedentary habits, and the wife of a prominent man in Orford, New Hampshire. For two years she had suffered from acute rheumatism and an unknown ailment called 'unseated neuralgia'. The electrical phenomena began on the evening of 25 January 1837 when she was feeling strange. She happened to pass her hand over her brother's face and, as she did so, vivid sparks shot from her fingers, to the astonishment of both. When she stood on a thick carpet, the sparks could be seen and heard discharging into objects near her hands – they were brilliant and shocking, felt by the woman and anyone she touched. The conditions favourable to bringing on the phenomena included hot weather with temperatures of about 80°F (20°C). Then the sparks would be about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches (4 centimetres) long, coming at the rate of four a minute.

Thinking the woman's silk clothes were generating the charges, Dr Hosford had her wear all cotton apparel. As a control, her sister wore silk. The woman's electricity was not reduced, and her sister remained normal. The electric charges, which caused her much

Below: her hair standing on end, science teacher Anthea Sothcott demonstrates the phenomenon of static electricity to her students. The Van der Graaf generator she touches is producing 500,000 volts; but she is standing on a deep pad of insulation, which cuts the current so drastically that no damage is done

discomfort, lasted for about six weeks, after which she was 'relieved of most of her neuralgia and other corporeal infirmities, and was in better health than she had been for many years'.

The atmospheric aspect was raised by Dr Hosford when he observed that 'a crimson aurora of uncommon splendour' was lighting the heavens and exciting scientific interest at the time of the Orford woman's strange attack. Her charges began on the same evening as this heavenly display of electricity, and Dr Hosford felt it was no mere coincidence. One is strongly reminded of the theory, put forward by Livingston Gearhart (see page 87), that relates instances of spontaneous human combustion to moments of change in the intensity of the Earth's magnetic field.

Perhaps the most famous 19th-century 'electric girl' was Annie May Abbott, who toured the world as 'The Little Georgia Magnet' in the late 1880s and early 1890s. On the stage in London in 1891, she raised a chair with a heavy man seated in it merely by touching it with the palm of her hand. Though she weighed only 7 stone (45 kilograms), groups of men could not lift her in a chair when she resisted it. In Japan she overcame the attempts of the huge and skilful Sumo wrestlers to budge her from where she stood, just as she could 'neutralise' their strenuous efforts to lift any small object upon which she had lightly rested her fingers. Another 'immovable' was Mary Richardson, who gave performances in Liverpool in September 1921. She was easily lifted one minute, and then six men would fail to move her even slightly. Her touch could knock men across the stage. A.C. Holms, the Scottish psychical researcher, put his hand on Mary's shoulder while a line of 13 men pushed against her and his hand, and he felt no pressure at all from their push. He was convinced that somehow the force exerted against her was neutralised or shunted, perhaps into another dimension.

The classic 'electric girl' must be Angélique Cottin, a 14-year-old French girl from Normandy. Her ordeal began on 15 January 1846 and lasted 10 weeks. The first manifestation was when the weaving frame on which she and three other girls were making gloves twisted and rocked. Within a short time the girl's parents exhibited her in Paris, where she came to the attention of a Dr Tanchou. Dr Tanchou reported to the Academy of Sciences that the girl could identify the poles of a magnet, agitate a compass and alternately attract and repel small objects like a magnet. He also said that he could feel a sensation 'like a cold wind' in her vicinity during these activities – such a wind being reminiscent of the breeze that blows away from a highly charged object. Objects were violently propelled away from her at her slightest touch; her bed rocked violently; chairs twisted away from under her when she tried to sit down; and a 60-pound (25-kilogram) table rose into the air when her apron brushed against it.

An empty performance

The academy appointed a research team, led by the famous physicist François Arago. Although Angélique performed as best she could, her phenomena seemed to have deserted her, which also happens when modern poltergeist children and 'spoon-benders' face a sceptical enquirer or the starkness of a laboratory. The committee had ignored Dr Tanchou's observations that the girl performed best when she was relaxed. Poor Angélique was extremely frightened by the situation and the manifestations that did occur, and frequently left the room. The committee reported that they could not corroborate any claims made for Angélique, but drew back from calling her a fraud.

Dr Tanchou had found that Angélique's force was strongest in the evening, especially after a meal, and that it radiated from her left wrist, inner left elbow and spine. From his experiments Dr Tanchou believed the cause was an undiscovered form of electricity. But Arago's team was not convinced. Besides, the academy was waging a 'holy war' against mesmerism at the time and could not accept phenomena so similar to those claimed by the detested practitioners and advocates of 'animal magnetism'. Arago recommended that the academy treat the case of Angélique Cottin 'as never having been sent in' – and another chance for the scientific world to discover what caused electrical phenomena in people slipped away.

Are we about to learn how the 'electric people' get their power? See page 2158

Me and my shadow

When impossible demands are made of us we say 'we can't be in two places at once' – but in 1845 a French teacher, Emilie Sagée, apparently was. Her well-witnessed bilocation was specially researched by COLIN GODMAN, who tells the story

IN 1853 THE AMERICAN WRITER Robert Dale Owen paused while in London to hear a story told by a young German woman that was to become a classic of its kind. It was the apparently well-documented story of a *doppelgänger*, the exact double that is supposed, according to legend, to stalk us all, but that stays just out of sight. The 'double' in this story – or 'fetch' as the Victorians chose to name it – stayed out of sight of its victim but nevertheless it evoked widespread terror. This 'fetch' was that of a French schoolmistress. And it was seen not only by the young woman telling the story, but by over 40 of her companions at school. Dale Owen made a note of every detail of the story, and it was soon to find a place in the annals of late 19th-century psychical research.

Julie von Güldenstubbe, the second daughter of the Baron von Güldenstubbe, was 13 in 1845 and attended a school for daughters of the nobility. This exclusive school, the Pensionat von Neuwelcke, was said to be 36 miles (58 kilometres) from the port of Riga and $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles (6 kilometres) from Wolmar in Livonia (now part of the USSR). Lessons were conducted in German, the language of the landowners and ruling classes. The principal, Herr Buch, a distinguished Moravian scholar, had appointed a French teacher, Mademoiselle Emilie Sagée, to the staff in 1845, and it was with her that Baroness Julie's story was concerned.

Above: Robert Dale Owen (1801–1877), the American writer who helped to popularise the strange tale of Emilie Sagée

Below: a scene from the BBC's Sagée story. Emilie, played by Juliet Harmer, was seen in the school garden while her double supervised the girls in the classroom

The French teacher said that she was born in Dijon 32 years before she took up her post at Neuwelcke. She was fair skinned, with chestnut hair and blue eyes, and was fairly tall and slim. The pupils described her as having a sweet and lovable nature. The superintendents at the school were entirely satisfied with her work and were impressed by her gaiety, intelligence and education.

Everything promised well for Mlle Sagée's career at Neuwelcke – but within a few weeks of her arrival she became the focus of rumour and gossip in the school. It seemed that Emilie could be – literally – in two places at once. If she was reported to be in a particular part of the school someone would contradict, saying, 'Oh no, she cannot be there; I just passed her on the stairs' or in some distant corridor. Individual pupils

repeated this sort of confusion time and time again, but the teachers dismissed the girls' stories as silly mistakes.

But naturally the most excitement was caused by the rumours that followed the first appearance of the 'double' to a number of witnesses. Mlle Sagée was giving a lesson to Julie von Güldenstubbe and 12 other girls. The subject of the lesson varied slightly with each storyteller: for example, one suggested Emilie was energetically demonstrating a mathematical theorem on the blackboard; Julie said the lesson was French grammar. What *was* agreed on was that Emilie Sagée was standing at the blackboard with her back to the class. Suddenly, a second 'Emilie' materialised at Mlle Sagée's side. The two were exactly alike and went through the same movements, synchronising perfectly. The only difference was that the real Emilie had chalk in her hand but the fetch had none; it merely mimed the teacher's action as she wrote on the board. This story caused a great sensation at Neuwelcke, particularly as all 13 pupils in the class agreed precisely in their description of what they had seen.

Soon after Emilie Sagée arrived at the small *pensionat* (boarding school) in 1845 the girls started spreading rumours that their new French teacher had been seen in two places at the same time. Naturally all eyes were on Mlle Sagée and the strain on her must have been extraordinary. She is said to have had moral support from Julie von Güldenstubbe (left, played by Lesley Manville)

Below: the real Emilie takes a lesson – but is soon to be joined by her double, or 'fetch', which mirrored her every move; however, only the real Emilie held chalk

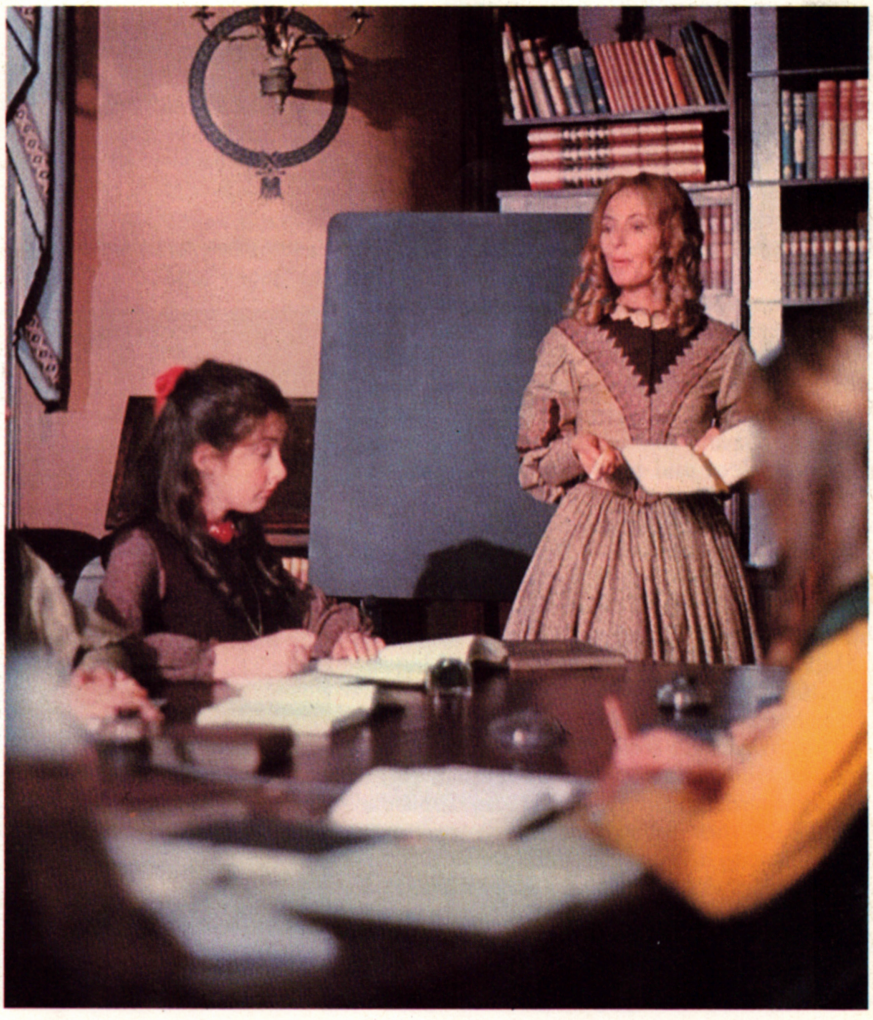
A spirited imitation

In the following weeks the fetch was seen on a number of occasions. For instance it appeared at dinner, standing behind Mlle Sagée and imitating her movements as she ate. But, as in the classroom, the double's hands were empty. On these occasions the schoolgirls were not alone in seeing Emilie's fetch; the servants also reportedly saw the figure behind the chair.

One of Julie's schoolfriends was badly frightened by the fetch. Fräulein Antonie von Wrangel was in a group invited to a local rural festivity and she was getting ready in her room. Emilie was helping her to fasten her dress. There was a mirror hanging behind them and Antonie turned to catch sight of two identical mademoiselles, each doing up her dress. Startled, she fainted clean away.

However, the fetch did not always mirror Emilie Sagée's actions. Sometimes, Baroness Julie reported, it would behave quite independently. For example, the real Mlle Sagée would rise from her chair – but her double would remain seated. Antonie von Wrangel and a group of friends looked after Emilie when she was taken ill with a feverish cold. The girls took turns to read to her as she recovered in bed. Antonie was alone with her when she noticed the colour suddenly drain from Mlle Sagée's face. She was so pale she seemed about to faint, and Antonie asked if she was feeling worse. Emilie answered in a weak and trembling voice that she was not, but her frightened look alarmed Antonie. A few moments later Antonie looked up from her book to see the fetch walking up and down the room, apparently in excellent health. This time Fräulein von Wrangel remained calm and did not tell Emilie what she had seen. When she came downstairs from Mlle Sagée's room she told the others exactly what she had experienced. On that occasion there had been only one witness – but the next and most remarkable appearance of the fetch was witnessed by the whole school.

This time all 42 pupils were gathered in



Left: pupil Antonie von Wrangel (actress Lalla Ward) faints after seeing Mlle Sagée's 'fetch' in the mirror while the teacher was helping her dress. Fräulein von Wrangel had happened to glance in a mirror that was hanging behind her – and saw two Emilie Sagées, one fastening her dress, the other, perfectly synchronised, going through the motions of doing so

the school hall to do their sewing and embroidery. Four french windows opened onto a corridor leading to the large garden in front of the house. The weather was fine and the girls had a clear view of the garden, where Mlle Sagée could be clearly seen picking flowers.

The girls sat round a long table and the teacher sat at one end, supervising their work. After a little while she got up to leave them alone for some reason. Her chair did not remain empty for long however, as suddenly Mlle Sagée appeared in it. The girls turned their eyes to the garden and, sure enough, there was Emilie. Although still gathering flowers, her movements were slow and languid as though – as the girls later remarked – she had suddenly been overcome with fatigue and tiredness. All the while her fetch sat silent and motionless.

Although afraid, the girls were getting used to the strange phenomena and two of the boldest among them decided to take a closer look at the fetch. They approached the chair, determined to touch the apparition. Stretching out their hands they encountered a slight resistance in the air surrounding it, such as a thin film of muslin or crêpe-de-chine might offer.

One brave girl tried to pass between the chair and the table – and stepped right through the figure in the chair. Emilie's double did not react, however, remaining seated until, a short time later, it slowly disappeared. As before, the girls turned to the garden to watch the real Mlle Sagée again gathering flowers with her usual animation.

All 42 girls agreed on what they had witnessed and some questioned their teacher soon after. They asked how she had felt in the garden and if she had experienced anything special. Emilie answered that she had noticed the other teacher leaving the girls unattended. Emilie had had a clear view of the empty chair and recalled wishing the teacher had not left her pupils alone to waste their time and probably get up to mischief. She had wished, she added, that she could have been sitting there to keep an eye on the girls so they would get on with their work.

Over a year had passed since Emilie Sagée had arrived at Neuwelcke and the girls had

Below: rural Latvia, the Eastern European setting for the Sagée saga

Mixed doubles

To come face to face with one's *doppelgänger*, or double, is a rare but chilling experience. The German poet Goethe (1749–1832) once met 'himself' coming towards him up a garden path; according to European folklore this should have been a sign of his imminent death, but Goethe lived for some years after his experience.

The doppelgänger, or in Victorian terms the 'fetch', is always said to be indistinguishable from the real person and is apparently solid-looking. However, much more common in the archives of psychical research is the ghostly double, or 'wraith', sometimes called the *ka* by occultists. This is believed to be attached to the physical body by an invisible cord that can stretch (left) to accommodate astral travel during sleep and that snaps at death.

Emilie Sagée's double seems to have harmed only her career, but it is said that the wraith, when disengaged from the body, can leave it prey to possession by all manner of evil spirits.

had plenty of opportunities to see and talk about the fetch – or doppelgänger as they must have called it. They noticed that there was an apparently vampiristic relationship or link between Emilie and her double. When the fetch appeared strong and clear Emilie seemed to suffer as a consequence, as though the wraith drew its power from the living woman. When she was busy and absorbed in a task she would suddenly be overcome with weakness and tiredness; at just such moments the double would be seen.

Emilie herself seems not to have seen her fetch while at Neuwelcke but she would be instantly alerted to its presence by the reactions of the girls around her. She also came to realise that the return of her strength and energy signalled the moment that the double disappeared.

Below: a music lesson is interrupted by a fresh rumour about the 'two Mlle Sagées'. In a closed community of impressionable adolescents the stories of the teacher's 'fetch' spread like wildfire until they became a craze. Discipline became difficult to maintain; in short, excellent teacher though she was, Mlle Sagée had to leave the school

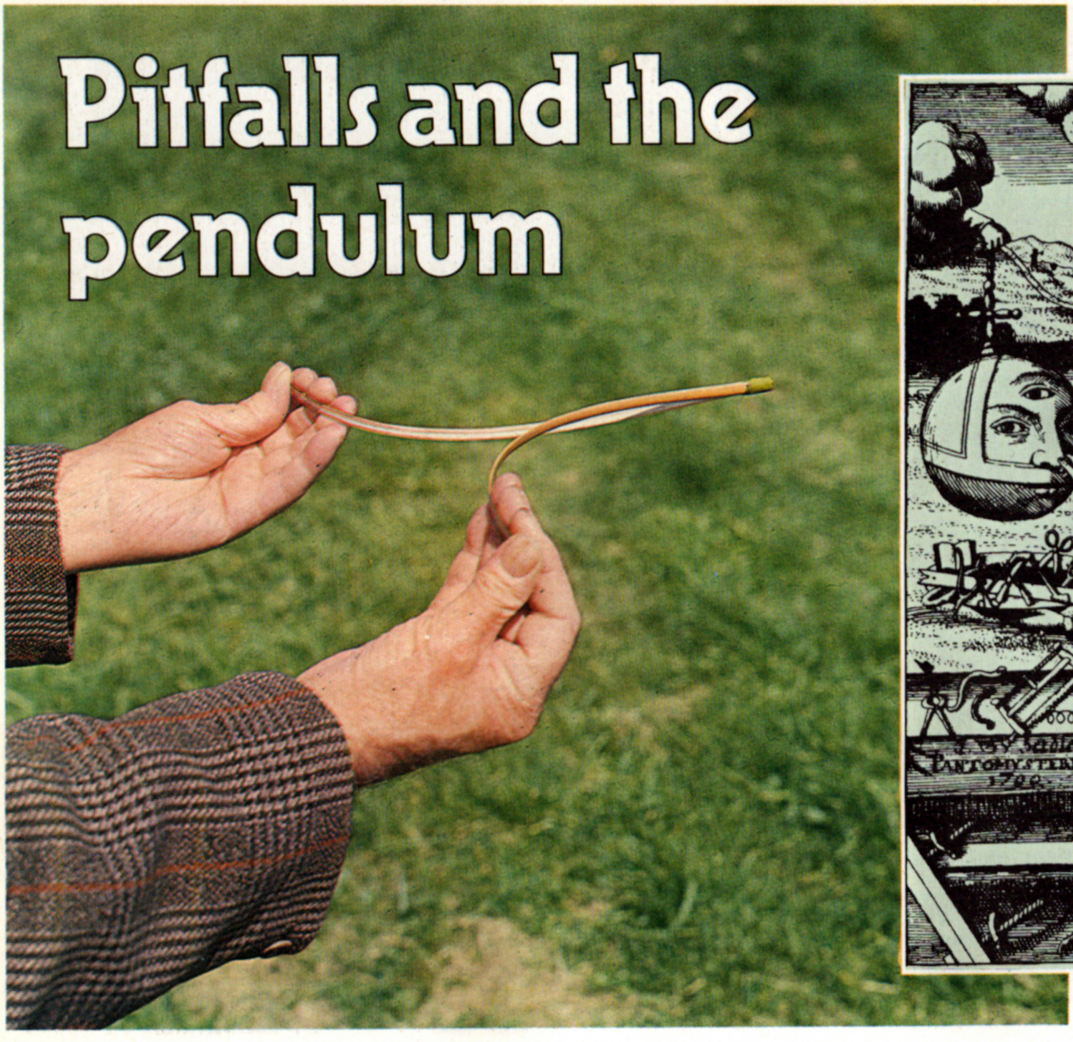
How did the school react to the events of 1845 and 1846? All the pupils, to some degree, had witnessed the phenomena; so Emilie, unwittingly, caused considerable commotion at Neuwelcke. Although she was very popular among the girls, the more timid gradually became disturbed by her presence. They told their parents, and the school directors noted with growing concern that fewer and fewer girls returned to the Pensionat at the beginning of each term.

The reasons they gave for leaving the school varied, but Herr Buch and his colleagues were left in little doubt as to the true reason for Neuwelcke's fall from favour. Buch must have been gravely tempted to dismiss Mlle Sagée, but she was, after all, a perfectly good teacher. She seemed, he realised, to be the innocent victim of something quite beyond her control. It would create a scandal to dismiss such an excellent teacher on what must have seemed like grounds of insanity – and scandals at Neuwelcke were to be avoided at all costs.

However, Julie von Güldenstubbe tells us that the school's hopes for normality were in vain. Eighteen months after Emilie Sagée had taken up her post at Neuwelcke the school rollcall of 42 had dwindled to a mere 12. Something had to be done.

But in the Emilie Sagée case was seeing really believing? See page 2150

Pitfalls and the pendulum



What moves the divining rod? All manner of causes – invariably modelled on the latest ideas of science – have been suggested. But TOM GRAVES doubts that theorists will be able to account for all that we know today of the rod's paradoxical properties

Above: a dowser holds a forked rod in his upturned hands. Those who believe in dowsing and those who are sceptical agree that the rod's twisting is caused by tiny muscular movements – but how are these linked with the object sought?

Above right: dowsing was satirised in *Pantomysterium*, a German book published in 1700. Here a dowser displays a variety of 'divining rods' – pairs of scissors, a crossed knife and fork, and even a pair of clay pipes. He is tweaking the nose of a curious head symbolising the City of God; behind him another dowser is similarly irreverent towards a priest. In the background the mystery of dowsing is explained: a rod is caused to move by a thread tugged by a tiny imp

DOWSING IS FASCINATING because it shouldn't work, according to contemporary views of reality. It throws a spanner into the works of scientific theory. The problem for the guardians of reality, the 'explainers' – priests in earlier times, scientists today – is that dowsing refuses to fit into any theoretical scheme. However you try to contort it, there is still something, some aspect, that refuses to be explained. If you describe it solely in physical terms, you cannot explain map dowsing; if you describe it in psychic terms, you leave out of account the 'hard' physical phenomena, such as minor magnetic or gravitational field changes that have been detected in association with dowsing; and so on.

In fact most interesting insights can be gained from watching the contortions of the 'official explainers' as they struggle to enclose a subject that just will not fit into their schemes of reality. A prize example, perhaps, was the sad attempt a few years ago by the London mathematician Professor John Taylor to define and explain dowsing. He started, he said, with the premise that there are only four forces in the Universe: electromagnetic, 'weak' and 'strong' nuclear, and gravitational. Dowsing *must* employ one of these, *almost certainly* the electromagnetic force, and *almost certainly* the low microwave frequency range. But while dowsing phenomena were occurring he could not record any definite activity on his microwave detectors. Therefore, he said, there was nothing for his equipment to observe; therefore there can have been no phenomena; therefore dowsing does not exist and cannot work.

The woolly reasoning and non-science are so blatant here that even the weekly magazine *New Scientist* complained – despite the apparent preference of that magazine, as many readers of *The Unexplained* will know, for 'knocking' reports on dowsing and on the paranormal in general.

Such a response from a scientist is not too surprising: anything that does not fit within the current framework of science is dangerous, and dowsing is one of many paranormal phenomena – sometimes dubbed 'Fortean'

'A murderous matter'

Jacques Aymar was born in 1662 in Dauphiné, southern France, an area noted for its water diviners. He became a dowser and found one day that his talent took an unusual direction. Digging at a spot indicated by the rod, he found, instead of water, the head of a murdered woman. At the woman's house (right) his rod reacted to the widower – who promptly fled. Aymar immediately acquired a reputation as a finder of criminals.

In his most celebrated case he was required to find the murderers of a wine merchant of Lyons and his wife. The rod led him along a circuitous route on the right bank of the Rhône. When the rod was active Aymar became feverish, his pulse raced, he felt faint and even spat blood. He announced that the trail had been left by three murderers. Along the way he indicated houses that the fugitives had entered, and his claims were confirmed. The trail led him, partly on land and partly on the river, to an army camp – but, he declared, the criminals had recently departed. Eventually Aymar led his armed escort to the prison in the town of Beaucaire, fully 150 miles (240 kilometres) south of Lyons. Here the rod indicated a man who had just been arrested for a petty larceny. Denying all knowledge of the murders, he was led back to Lyons by the route Aymar had indicated. Overwhelmed by the accuracy of Aymar's knowledge, the man confessed to the crime; eventually he was broken on the wheel. Aymar continued to follow the trail of the other two criminals until it crossed the French frontier and he had to end the search.

Aymar stated that the violent agitations that he felt when pursuing murderers were absent when he was searching for thieves, water or money. It was speculated that he could detect a *matière meurtrière* – a 'murderous matter' – given off by murderers. He replied that, on the contrary, he followed not a 'generally murderous' trail, but the path of a specific person.

phenomena (see page 1721) – that are fascinatingly obstinate in their refusal to fit within *any* framework, scientific, religious or otherwise.

Since the rise of modern science in the 16th and 17th centuries, there has been a continuous sequence of protectors of the current view of reality, the current 'paradigm'. First the Inquisition, then varying brands of religion, and then the new Inquisition of the scientific establishment. We can see these changes, these revolutions in thinking, reflected in the explanations that were offered for dowsing at the time; and since it still remains unexplained, it gives us an insight into the limitations of the current view of reality as well.

The work of evil forces

The earliest detailed attempts to explain dowsing (as opposed to merely giving practical descriptions) appear during the 17th century. In the main they were written by learned divines, Protestant or Catholic, who generally regarded dowsing as the work of evil forces. Perhaps they were influenced by Luther's condemnation of the activity: he listed it among practices that violated the commandments against worshipping false gods and graven images. But a Jesuit priest, Athanasius Kircher, wrote in 1641 on the divining rod – which he refused to call by that name, preferring terms free of the suggestion of magic, such as *virgula metalloscopia* – and asserted that after making numerous trials he was convinced of its efficacy. He was the first to state that the rod moved because of the unconscious muscular movements of the dowser, claiming that he had demonstrated this by experiment.

However, in 1658 a dissertation at the University of Wittenberg, in Germany, discussed the questions of whether dowsing was due to the action of an 'occult force'. The author decided that, while the rod really did move, occult forces were not the cause: usually fraud was to be blamed – and the remaining cases were due to a pact with the Devil.

The frontispiece of *The idol unmasked* of 1704, by Theophilus Albinus, is a beautiful illustration of the unmasking of a dowser (see page 516), while Zeidler's slightly earlier *Pantomysterium* shows the tip of a rod being pulled by a string in the hand of a tiny demon. It is worth remembering that in these times 'the work of the Devil' was as convenient a blanket term for inexplicable phenomena as 'supernatural' is today.

One of the most sensational cases in the

Left: a congress of dowsers, photographed in 1913. In the centre is the Abbé Mermet, demonstrating the use of a pocket watch as a dowsing pendulum. Mermet was noted for his ability to find the bodies of missing people, working at a distance with a map

Below left: Charles Adams of Rowberrow in Somerset, portrayed in a pamphlet published in 1853. The author, Francis Phippen, was a journalist who, while on a visit to Somerset, was impressed by the widespread use of dowsing. Adams claimed to 'see' underground springs clairvoyantly while the rod was indicating them

history of dowsing nicely illustrates this point of fashions of thought. One Jacques Aymar, a citizen of Lyons, France, with the improbable-sounding ability to locate criminal activity by dowsing, was called on in 1692 to find the murderers of a wine merchant and his wife – which he did. The interesting point is that the 'explainers' of the time stated that Aymar's rod reacted to some 'murderous matter' given off by the murderer. This sounds naïve now; but it is important to note that this explanation was entirely in tune with the then current description of reality: that all matter was linked by corpuscles of different qualities passing through an invisible ether.

Contemporary explanations of dowsing are typified by this description by William Pryce, written in 1778:

> The corpuscles . . . that rise from the Minerals, entering the rod, determine it to bow down, in order to render it parallel to the vertical lines which the effluvia describe in their rise. In effect the Mineral particles seem to be emitted from the earth; now the Virgula, being of a light porous wood, gives an easy passage to these particles, which are also very fine and subtle; the effluvia then driven forwards by those that follow them, and pressed at the same time by the atmosphere incumbent on them, are forced to enter the little interstices between the fibres of the wood, and by that effort they oblige it to incline, or dip down perpendicularly, to become parallel with the little columns which those vapours form in their rise.

At this point, dowsers were certain that the rod moved under the action of external mechanical forces; the dowser played a purely passive role. In the 19th century, new theories of dowsing became fashionable:

electricity, the so-called 'Odic force' of Baron von Reichenbach, a 19th-century German chemist, and Mesmer's 'animal magnetism' (see page 56) appear in one form or another. By the beginning of the present century, 'resonance' was in fashion – a fashion that still seems to hold sway. The influential Abbé Mermet based his theories on the assumption that all bodies without exception are constantly emitting undulations or radiations. The human body enters these fields of influence and becomes the seat of nervous reactions, of some kind of 'current' that flows through the hands. If an appropriate object, such as a rod or pendulum, is held in the hand, the invisible flux is made manifest in the movements given to this object, which acts as a kind of indicator.

Obsession with radiation

Like the earlier explanation of dowsing, the 'corpuscular' theory, this idea of 'radiations' is in accord with the main physical theory of its time, that of energies transmitted as the waves of the electromagnetic spectrum. As Mermet was writing his desciption, in the early 1920s, the older theories were giving way to the more complete but utterly paradoxical quantum theory, in which energy exists as waves or particles, according to the circumstances.

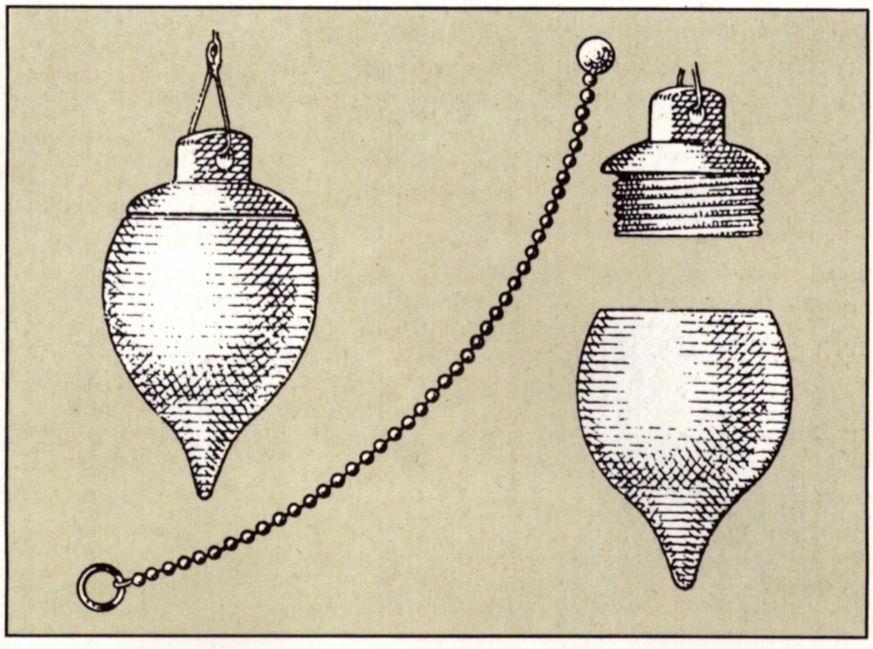
This emphasis in dowsing literature on 'radiations' of a doubtful nature becomes almost an obsession in certain types of medical dowsing. In radionics in particular, some kind of radiation was (and by many people still is) supposed to resonate with the circuits in a 'black box', containing an assortment of magnets and other paraphernalia. Although a great deal of research was done to try to identify the nature of the supposed radiations – particularly by the De la Warr Laboratories – the nearest they could come to a conclusion were vague hints that the

'radiations' were linked to 'matter in the making', to 'new worlds beyond the atom' (the titles of two books by George de la Warr).

But not all attempts to relate dowsing to modern physics are so unsuccessful: there *is* a physical side. During the middle part of the present century – over some 30 years – various groups of researchers tried to pin down physical forces associated with on-site dowsing. S.W. Tromp in Holland and, particularly, J.C. Maby and T. Bedford Franklin, working on behalf of the British Society of Dowsers, ploughed through experiment after experiment, noting physical phenomena apparently associated with the dowsers' response.

And parallels were found. Franklin and Maby's work covers effects of and interactions with the Earth's magnetic fields, background cosmic radiation levels (an interesting parallel here with some of the results of the current Dragon Project work on standing stones – see page 1576), weather, radio waves and many other phenomena; Tromp produced much the same results independently, and then concentrated more on the physiology of the dowser and the dowsing response. Maby *almost* succeeded in developing an automatic dowsing instrument; Tromp pinned down the physiological mechanism as a precise and predictable reflex response in the dowser, which needed the dowser's instruments only to make the response more obvious. Tromp must also take most of the credit for proving at last that the dowser's rod does not move of its own accord – despite his own impressions, the dowser does in fact move it.

This is all very well, but it doesn't really help either. If you read through Maby's and Tromp's work, it becomes clear that the only thing that was predictable was that there would be *some* such physical parallel – but probably a *different* physical force each time. At each point at which the physical mechanism seemed to have been pinned down – weak magnetic fields at one point, microwaves at another – the particular 'parallel' would suddenly become inconsistent.

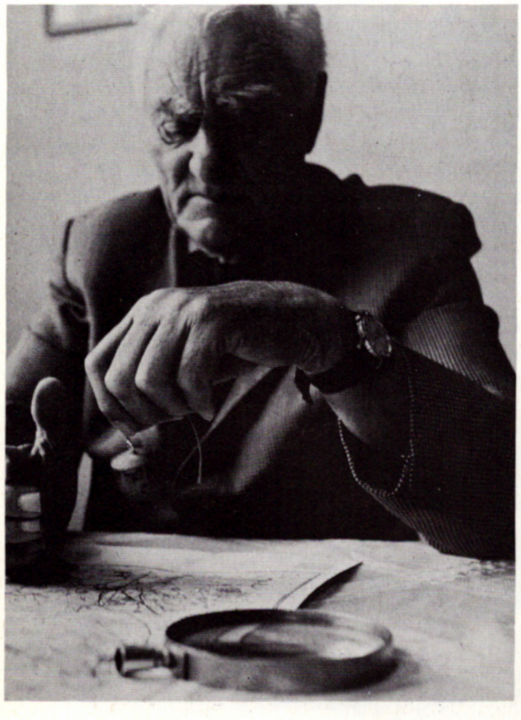


The dowsing pendulum devised and patented by the Abbé Mermet. 'Witnesses' of the object being sought could be placed in the hollow bob: some article connected with a missing person, for example, or water if the dowser was searching for a spring

The same thing happens in many areas of the paranormal; as soon as you think you have found out 'how it really works', the apparent physical mechanism promptly changes to something else. There is even a technical term to describe this – the 'bloody-mindedness' of paraphysical phenomena!

What we do know more about is how it can *be* worked – a technological concern rather than a scientific one, leading to a 'magical technology', if you like. We know that dowsing works essentially by reflex reaction in the dowser, and follows all the usual rules for perception. As with any perceptual mechanism, it responds best to contrast rather than a constant 'background', however strong; it is subject to personal experience and interpretation, on the lines of the paradox 'things have to be believed to be seen'; and it can work by means of a wide range of stimuli, and the interactions of any or all of the forces that cause those stimuli. The only oddity is that it does not seem greatly to care whether physical forces are involved or not.

What does matter is that the dowsing ability exists in all of us in one form or another – to throw a spanner in the works of our conventional thinking and to span the gap between the normal world of technology and the not so normal world of paraphysics, and between theoretical belief and practical action. It is, by its nature, absurd – impossible to explain in any way that covers all its aspects. But it is there, fascinating as ever, to be enjoyed and studied and used, as it has been throughout the ages.



Map dowsing makes nonsense of any theory that explains dowsing by 'radiations' from the target object influencing the dowser; its effectiveness is independent of distance, quite unlike any type of radiation known to science

Further reading

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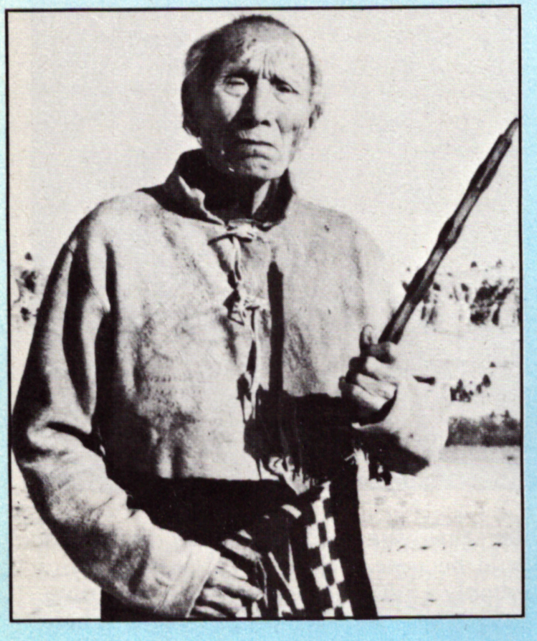
J.S. Elliot, *Dowsing: one man's way*, Spearman 1977

Tom Graves, *Dowsing: techniques and applications*, Turnstone 1976

Francis Hitching, *Pendulum – the psi connection*, Fontana 1977

Abductions: the inside story

Is the UFO phenomenon rooted in the experience of human birth? Analysing the famous Andreasson case, ALVIN LAWSON concludes that it is – and stresses the importance of this testable hypothesis for ufology



AMERINDIAN SHAMANS, like Black Elk of the Oglala Sioux, believed that they could travel from Earth to other worlds via a 'cosmic pillar', often symbolised by a pole or a tree. Black Elk often chose a spot beside a tree to begin his trances. Shortly a spirit guide in the form of a bird would lead him upwards through a tunnel-like aperture and further upwards into a 'flaming rainbow tepee' where Black Elk met and communicated with a group of 'grandfathers'. At this point in many accounts, the shaman is forced to undergo painful bodily dismemberment – a demon removes every organ, bone and even blood cell in his body! But everything is then replaced, after being cleansed and purified – and the shaman is spiritually and physically reborn, ready to return to his people with renewed spiritual energies. Sometimes Black Elk was returned on a 'little cloud'. Clearly, 'abduction' stories such as these, extraordinarily similar to UFO abduction narratives with their echoes of the events that accompany birth – the perinatal events – have been around for a very long time.

Below: an American Indian medicine man goes into a trance. American Indian folklore tells how shamans – as recent as Black Elk of the Oglala Sioux, photographed here in 1947 (left) – regularly underwent experiences closely similar to UFO abduction reports

Those people who believe that UFO abductions relate to alien beings, parallel universes or other exotic origins will eventually have to explain – along with the lack of unambiguous physical evidence – why the incidents and images reported by abductees are so similar to those reported in a variety of obviously psychological processes, including drug-induced hallucinations, near-death experiences, religious and metaphysical ecstasies and shamans' trances – like Black Elk's.

Every one of us has undergone a birth trauma. The universal phenomenon of birth is free from ordinary cultural influences – for we experience it before we have undergone any kind of cultural conditioning – and is, as far as we know, one of the first significant events consciously experienced by human beings. Although it is important to note that the causal link between specific events of biological birth and particular images has yet to be established, it seems that in the birth trauma we have a powerful experience that

Left: when Betty Andreasson was abducted from her home in South Ashburnham, Massachusetts, on 25 January 1967, she found herself sitting in a clear plastic chair with a fitted cover filled with a grey liquid. Closing her eyes, she felt pleasant vibrations and was fed some sweet fluid through a tube in her mouth. She felt relaxed and happy. The whole experience, Alvin Lawson points out, is a classic reflection of good experiences in the womb

could serve as the source of much imagery – among it that reported by alleged victims of abductions by alien creatures. The fact that the experience of birth is similar for everyone accounts for the similarity of abduction reports from all over the world, while the fact that no two births are identical accounts for the differences between them.

Let us examine one of ufology's classic abduction cases in the light of the birth trauma hypothesis.

At about 7 p.m. on 25 January 1967 Mrs Betty Andreasson, of South Ashburnham, Massachusetts, USA, was allegedly abducted from her living room by a group of alien beings. Her abduction began with a bright light that flashed outside her house, shortly after which a group of 4-foot (1.2-metre) beings appeared. They communicated with Betty, then floated her outside and into a waiting craft where she was examined, immersed in a liquid, and then apparently taken for a journey into alien realms. At the climax of her adventure she witnessed a huge bird that spoke to her and then, phoenix-like, was consumed in flames – an event that Betty, a devout fundamentalist Christian, interpreted in religious terms. She heard a voice that she thought was God's saying, 'I have chosen to show you the world,' apparently because of her sincere faith. After this, Betty's captors returned her safely home. The alleged abduction had lasted about 3 hours and 40 minutes.

The Andreasson case is useful because it has been extensively investigated by a group of dedicated ufologists, the main witness is considered reliable, and the case details are representative of abduction narratives as a whole. Further, Betty is a competent artist and was able to provide many sketches of her adventure. In short, the Andreasson close encounter of the third kind is about as reliable and detailed as any abduction case we are likely to find. At the same time, it has significant implications for UFO abduction research, for it contains a wealth of perinatal images and events that support a non-physical or psychological interpretation of this case and of the UFO abduction mystery in general.

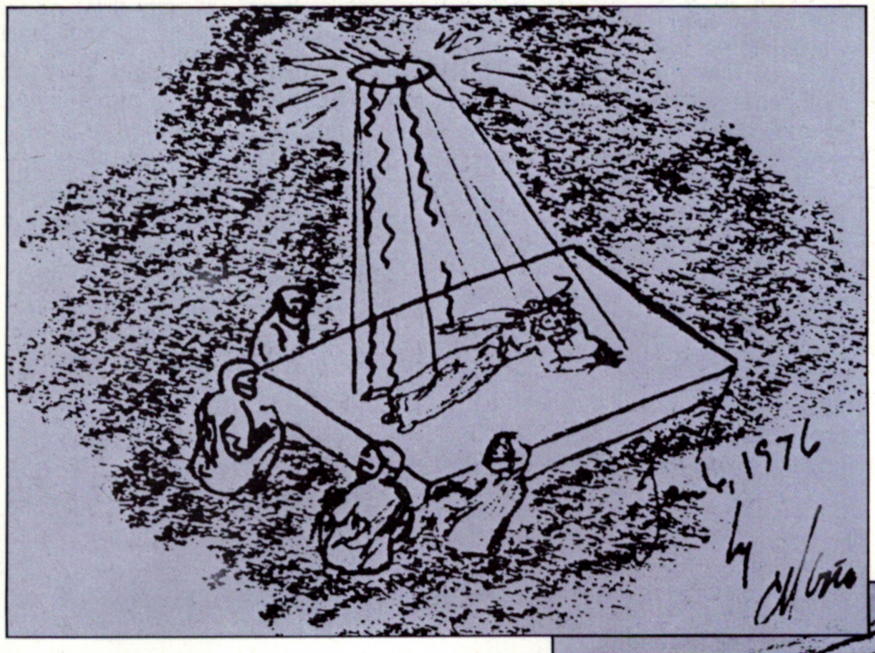
The Andreasson case presents several clear birth trauma images. For example, Betty's humanoids were of the classic foetus variety – greyish skin, oversized heads, huge eyes, and underdeveloped noses, ears and mouths (see page 2086) – although they behaved like apparitions in passing through solid doors and materialising at will. The leader seemed to change his facial features so that he became yet more foetus-like in his final meeting with Betty.

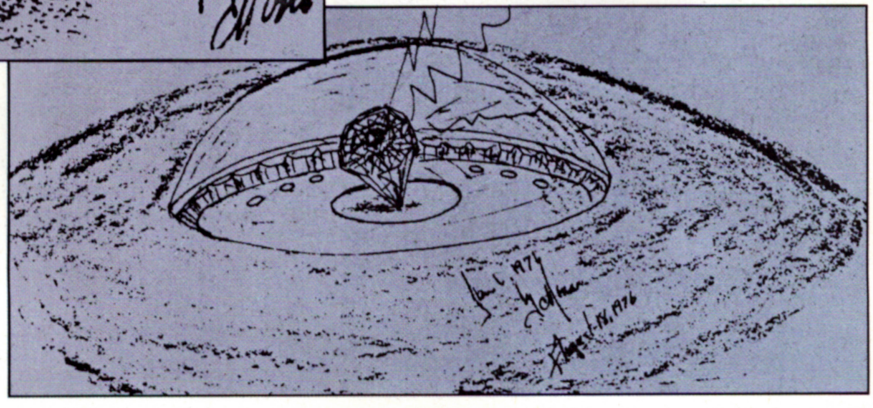
Pleasant vibrations

The event most obviously linked with perinatal imagery occurred in what Betty described as the cylindrical room, where she was enclosed in a clear plastic chair with a fitted cover, which her captors filled with a grey fluid. She breathed through clear tubes that fitted into her nostrils and mouth. A telepathic voice told her to close her eyes. Suddenly she felt pleasant vibrations, the fluid whirled, she was fed some sweet substance through the tube in her mouth, and she was relaxed and happy. Floating and tranquil, she became one with the 'undulating fluid'. After a time the fluid was drained, she was taken out, and she realised that her head hurt.

The scene can obviously be interpreted as

Below: *The garden of delights* by Hieronymus Bosch (*c.*1450–*c.*1516). This picture of a kind of paradise shares with many abduction cases the imagery of what Alvin Lawson calls 'good' womb experiences – a pleasant state of suspension within a transparent sac (left), for example, and the ocean as a symbol of prenatal well-being (top)





Three Kentucky women were allegedly abducted by aliens on 7 January 1976. Sketches they later produced while under hypnosis show clear birth trauma imagery. They saw a woman on an observation table or bed, apparently being examined by humanoids (top) – an obvious parallel with a baby's first moments outside the womb; and a huge eye (above), a symbol of the universal consciousness often associated in other abduction reports with tranquil periods of the foetus's life within the womb

a return to the womb: the cylindrical room is itself only one of several womb analogues in Betty's narrative; the transparent chair suggests the amniotic sac in which Betty floated in a foetal position; the grey liquid is the amniotic fluid; the breathing and feeding tubes are the umbilical cord. The tranquillising undulations and vibrations suggest a reversion to 'good' womb experiences (see page 2087). Betty's headache may be a manifestation of the onset of another part of the remembered birth process.

Betty spent much of her time on board the UFO 'floating' from one womblike room to another, through tunnels and on elevators or other counterparts of the birth canal. Betty's tunnels varied in length but typically ended with doorways into brightly lit, dome-shaped rooms, where she was undressed, examined or 'cleansed'. The doorways suggest the cervical openings: usually a bare wall seemed to separate with a soft 'whoosh' on approach and unite again afterwards, leaving no trace; other openings Betty described included a circular membrane and some mirror-like doors through which she crashed harmlessly.

Alien probes

During the medical examination that Betty alleges she underwent – in a big, bright room – the aliens inserted needle-tipped tubes into her nasal cavities and into her navel. In a hypnotic session conducted later by investigators, Betty remembered this experience:

> I can feel them moving that thing . . . he's going to put it in my navel! O-h-h. I don't like this . . . I can feel them moving that thing around in my stomach or my body . . . Oh! He's pushing that again . . . around, feeling things . . . . Feels like he's going right around my stuff inside – feeling it, or something with that needle.

Betty was told by the aliens that the navel probe was a test for 'procreation', and afterwards she was told that there were 'some parts missing'. Betty had had an hysterectomy, and was evidently reliving her own medical history; but the navel also commonly appears as an analogue of the umbilical cord in abduction reports. The aliens said they were 'awakening' something with their probing – an element of death and rebirth that was articulated in Betty's case more clearly by the phoenix.

In Betty's vision, a worm emerged from the ashes of the phoenix. At the same time two things seemed to be happening to her, both well-established perinatal events: she felt an intense, shivering chill come over her, when only a moment before she had been complaining of intense heat, and 'the worst thing I've ever experienced'.

It seems that the birth trauma hypothesis 'fits' – but is it correct to say that all abduction narratives are relivings of the witness's birth trauma? Even if this is the case, of course, it does not invalidate the experience or prove that abduction experiences are all in the mind. What it means is that the UFO phenomenon stimulates a certain kind of hallucination in the human mind. The nature of the phenomenon itself remains obscure.

The importance to ufology of the birth trauma hypothesis lies in the fact that it is one of the very few testable theories ever to have been proposed in this most sensational area of the UFO phenomenon. If ufology is ever to become a truly scientific discipline, viable hypotheses will have to be offered – and also tested. In this instance, serious and objective investigators should make a thorough study of perinatal events and investigate the medical and birth history of the abductee before proceeding to an analysis of the abduction case. For, until the abduction witness's psychology is made the main focus of investigation in close encounters of the third kind, and fantastic theories such as the extra-terrestrial hypothesis are allowed to await whatever extraordinary proofs they may demand, abduction researchers will not attract – neither will they deserve – serious and widespread scientific attention.

Further reading

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Curtis G. Fuller, *Proceedings of the first international UFO congress*, Warner Books (New York) 1980
Ronald D. Story, *The encyclopedia of UFOs*, New English Library 1980

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
One autumn recently we visited the land of our forbears, Scotland, seeing many places steeped in history, such as Stirling and Bannockburn. But it was Culloden Moor, where in 1746 the Jacobites under Charles Edward Stuart fell to 'Butcher' Cumberland's redcoats, that struck us most forcibly – for, although there are flocks of wild birds around the area, we noticed that not a single bird sings at that spot.

And it is rumoured that since Bonnie Prince Charlie's time no heather will grow around the graves of the Highlanders. Altogether the moor is a sad and eerie place.

Yours faithfully,
Danny Ward Kempston, Bedfordshire

It is also rumoured that there is no wildlife in or around the area of the former concentration camp at Auschwitz. We have had no opportunity to verify this but, if it is true, perhaps it is connected with the idea that living things flourish in an atmosphere of harmony, and quickly die in one of hate and fear. This seems to be borne out by the research of the American Cleve Backster into the apparent sensitivity of plants to the feelings of people around them (see page 490), and by the Grad/Estebany experiments into the marked difference shown in the growth rate of plants that have been nurtured by psychics or mental patients (see page 1006). Perhaps because a battle once raged in a particular spot – such as Culloden Moor – the intense negative emotions generated there may have created a no-man's land for wildlife. Similarly, the appalling distress of the concentration camp inmates may have wiped out the possibility of life there. On the other hand, Flanders suddenly became ablaze with poppies, and the jungle is said to have taken over the infamous Burma railway – so who can say why 'no birds sing' in some places and not in others?

Dear Sir,
My son and I are avid readers of *The Unexplained* each week, but it was Simon Innes's 'black dog' stories (see page 1710) that prompted me to write to you.

In 1960 I was about to go out shopping when I saw a tall, shaggy-haired black Labrador standing in front of the fireplace in my lounge. I wondered how it could have got in – all the doors and windows were closed at the time. I looked at it closely and at first I thought it had sore eyes; but as if to clarify the matter, they suddenly glowed bright red! Then, much to my relief, the dog disappeared into a blue smokey haze.

Pulling myself together, I finally set out for the shops, but I only got as far as the front gate before a telegram boy rode up. As my mother was convalescing in Bridlington at the time I supposed the telegram contained news of her return home. But the message was from the matron of the convalescent home, telling me of my mother's sudden death after an attack of thrombosis. Was the black dog the real bringer of the bad news?

Another instance of the paranormal I can recall happened years ago when I was in York, helping my mother to look after her mother, who had just had a stroke. One night I woke up to see a lady standing by my bedside; she had a centre hair parting topped by a little lace cap with black velvet ribbon slotted through it. She wore a black dress with 'shoulder of mutton' style sleeves, which was covered in black beads. She gave me a lovely smile; I sat up in bed and tried to touch her but she faded out of sight.

Next day my mother said that Gran seemed very tired and cold, so we sent for the doctor, but before she arrived, my grandmother had died. I then told my mother about the 'lady' I had seen by my bed. She told me it sounded like her grandmother, who died when she (my mother) was only a schoolgirl. The beaded dress was later given to her; she unpicked the beads and threaded them on cotton and used the black velvet ribbon to tie up her pigtails. My mother said that the vision must have come for her daughter. Up to that point in my life I had never believed in paranormal things, but that vision changed my outlook entirely.

My mother and I also had a very faithful dog who was 15 when he died. After his death my mother and I were coming home from the cinema one night when she began to look around. At first I was bewildered by her behaviour but then I, too, heard the same, familiar doggy footsteps. But there was nothing to be seen anywhere. And that night, after we had gone to bed, we heard him barking downstairs. We even got up and went looking for him – but there was nothing there.

From time to time after that we heard him bark, just as when alive he used to bark at the courting couples who parked in the lane behind our house. Even after he died it seemed he was still our faithful guard dog.

Yours faithfully,
Sarah Anne Moore Leeds, Yorkshire

Dear Sir,
Since writing about the planet/sunspot theories of J.H. Nelson for *The Unexplained* (see page 1873), I have learned that Dr David Nias of the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, has produced good evidence indicating that Nelson's predictions were based on a statistical error – and could not be repeated after a correlation analysis and radio disturbances observed over a 15-month period.

This does not mean, as some sceptics may suppose, that all theories of planetary influence on sunspots have been disproved. Nias's findings, first published in the journal *Correlation* (December 1981), are summarised for the general reader in *Astrology – science or superstition* (1982) by Nias and Eysenck. This gives sympathetic consideration to a far more exciting claim, by the British researcher Dr G.A. Dean, that the sunspot cycle coincides markedly with crossings of the solar equatorial plane by the Jupiter-Neptune midpoint, and has done so for 320 years.

Eysenck and Nias express surprise that no astronomer has yet attempted to replicate Dean's calculations or has even acknowledged them. So do I, but astronomers have always recoiled in horror from any theory that smacks of astrology.

Yours faithfully,
Guy Lyon Playfair London

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

The sound of silence

Psychokinesis (PK), or mind over matter, is a controversial subject, even among parapsychologists – but PK 'sitter groups' are flourishing. Inspired by Julian Isaacs's outspoken championship of the SORRAT group's remarkable phenomena (see page 1210), three members of *The Unexplained* staff, Lynn, Annie and Frances, decided to form their own PK group in November 1981. It turned out to be a disappointing experience, but several valuable lessons were learned.

The group, augmented by Richard, a scientist, Patrick, a civil servant, and Robert, a waiter, was launched in style: Julian Isaacs met the beginners over a glass of wine and gave his best advice – the benefit of his vast experience in setting up successful PK groups. He said the atmosphere to aim for was an informal, chatty, jokey one. The PK would then happen almost incidentally.

The group decided to meet every Monday evening and to try an updated version of the 19th-century parlour game of table-turning, but without the Victorian belief that spirits were responsible. Annie had witnessed spectacular table levitations as a guest at another sitter group; Lynn had, as a teenager, often heard paranormal rapping; and the others had a strong interest in the parapsychological aspect of weird happenings.

Richard donated a fine kitchen table – but the problem was where to meet. The ideal place would have been someone's cosy sitting room, but everyone seemed to live in inconvenient or to the others downright inaccessible places. Finally, the group had to settle for the conference room in Orbis House, the Covent Garden home of *The Unexplained*. This turned out to be perhaps the group's major error.

The trouble with trivia

The first meeting very swiftly showed up the difference between theory and practice. It was all very well to set out to be 'informal and chatty' but when it came to it, it had all the spontaneity of reacting to a quizmaster's 'you have two hours in which to be informal and chatty beginning *now*'!

But in a darkened room, hands lightly on the table, the group doggedly chatted about trivia. Only a few minutes into that first session loud scrabbling noises emitted from one corner of the room, such as those made by a mouse rummaging in a paper bag; they were disproportionately intrusive.

'A mouse' said the group as one. Lynn poked around in the corner whence the sounds came. Isaacs said later that in such cases one should *never* get up and investigate, nor even mention the disturbance. The idea is that if you ignore it, the PK will react like a spoilt child, becoming noisier to force itself on your attention. As it was, the investigation revealed no mouse, no paper bag and no mousehole – and, apparently, so common is this scrabbling sound in PK groups that investigators have dubbed it 'the scratchings'.

After the first session some members of the group warily reported strange raps and thuds on walls and roofs at home – and on one occasion on the roof of a train – but perhaps this was being over-credulous. Isaacs had, however, warned the group to expect PK anywhere, at any time.

After this first mild excitement a pattern soon emerged; one or another member of the group fell by the wayside, the others continuing to meet in the Orbis conference room in an increasingly pessimistic frame of mind. Besides this, there were added distractions such as cleaners hoovering in the corridor outside.

One thing after another

Various techniques were tried to enliven the proceedings – including ending some sessions with the use of a ouija board, or alternating periods of chat with periods of deep concentration; but apart from a few creaks and rustles, there was only the sound of silence – and the table moved not at all.

By mid March 1982 interest was obviously waning. In a last-ditch effort to save the experiment, the group discussed the possibility of trying to create a 'Philip'-type entity (see page 1021). Briefly this caught the group's imagination; this created 'ghost' was to be called Piqué, and live in the future. But hearts were not really in it, and in late March the group folded.

The experiment, pathetic though it was in many ways, could at least be assessed and analysed. The main obstacle to success had been the meeting place, which was not conducive to a relaxed atmosphere, and the flitting from attempted table tilting to ouija board and so on had been a mistake. And the experiment had been given only five months; the SORRAT group, after all, had met for 16 years before they achieved their spectacular phenomena!

But the group was not completely disillusioned; everyone agreed that, given the right conditions, they would be willing to give it another try.